

Part 5: Winning Through Your "Guru Quotient"

The Guru Builder
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This is part of our continuing series on how to be a guru, describing some of the factors "wannabe" gurus need to build in order to be accepted as such.

Qualifications needed to be a guru

Like much of life, qualifications can be divided into "gotta have" and "nice to have."

Someone wanting to build a position as a "guru" lawyer, architect, engineer, actuary or accountant will need the professional designation required to do the work itself. It is also essential to be a member in good standing of one's professional association.

However, in many cases one does not need actual professional qualifications. This includes much of the consulting world - being a CMC may give clients some comfort level, but it's not essential (with apologies to those who, like myself, worked hard to receive that designation).

Note that the bar is rising, so that some qualifications are becoming de facto standards. A university degree seems to be an entrance requirement, and for many clients, an MBA seems to be virtually required.

To move from "garden" to "guru" status, one needs to go above and beyond to the usual qualifications. This may include achieving the "Fellow" status offered by many professional organizations, including CAMC. These designations are generally only handed out based on a member's service to the organization, experience and superior performance. If this is in demand in the market or will help differentiate, it may be wise to find out the qualifications for "guru" status and then take steps to make it happen.

In some cases, qualifications from another profession may be in demand. For example, many consultants find that the Project Management Professional (PMP) designation, conferred by the Project Management Institute, is a useful designation.

Keeping knowledge up to date is important, so continuing education is an important part of being a guru. Some clients are impressed by courses taken at prestigious schools. This type of qualification is much easier to obtain since the advent of online learning.

Body of work

Closely allied to Qualifications is the guru's body of work. This means a need for a

significant history of solving thorny client problems, which is one reason why it's difficult for a young person to be accepted as a guru. The body of work needs to be in a variety of areas, so it's clear it's actually several years of experience, not just several repeats of the same year.

A good body of work makes one easier to hire - the person advocating someone's services can say to colleagues or superiors, "Look at where this person has worked and all they've done."

It's not enough to have a fantastic background and have nobody know about it. In part, this can be corrected through effective marketing materials. Projects should be listed on the resume, and case studies posted on the Web.

Also, some of the guru's published articles should discuss case studies, giving as much detail as possible about the issues, without violating client confidentiality. Speeches and seminars should include descriptions of completed projects too.

Building a body of work needs to be done in a deliberate way. It may include taking assignments not for how much one can "earn," but how much one can "learn."

Body of knowledge

A body of knowledge also needs to be built in a deliberate way and likewise, almost certainly cannot be done quickly.

It includes these elements:

- Analyzing one's own past work to see what lessons can be drawn from it;
- Taking courses for the knowledge to be gained, not just for another certificate on the wall;
- Deliberate reading of one's client's trade press, attending their conferences, and learning about the issues they are facing.

For example, anyone doing work in the automotive sector needs to be well informed about unions, particularly the powerful UAW. Anyone in forestry needs to be "up" on environmental issues. A civil engineer needs to know about trends in architecture, and vice versa.

In the next article in this series, we'll consider some of the other essential building blocks of being a guru.

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